



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food and  
Nutrition  
Service

Mountain  
Plains  
Region

1244 Speer Boulevard  
Denver, CO 80204

Reply to  
Attn. of:

SP 94-C-10

NOV 8 1993

Subject:

Preservation of Facsimile Transmissions as Official Records

To:

STATE AGENCY DIRECTORS - Colorado ED, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri ED,  
(Special Nutrition Programs) Montana OPI, Nebraska ED, North Dakota,  
South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming ED

In policy memorandum 94-C-9 we referenced the acceptability of claims for reimbursement received by datafax. To address the related issue of the preservation of datafax transmissions, the following are excerpts from a bulletin providing guidance for handling such transmissions at the Federal level and we recommend that similar practices should be followed at the State level:

1. Background

- a. Facsimile transmissions have become a common means of office communication. Since an increasing number of documents are received by fax, records managers have requested guidance in the handling of such materials.
- b. Most facsimile transmissions are made using "thermal paper." The images on thermal paper may begin to deteriorate in as few as 6 months. Such thermal papers are sensitive to heat environments (including markers, cosmetics, and some types of plastic folders), and may contain impermanent dyes. As a result, the text is likely to fade, becoming illegible, or the whole paper surface darkens, making the image indistinguishable. Thermal paper can be recognized by its smooth sheen and tendency to curl.
- c. Some facsimile machines produce copies on plain paper by xerographic means, which produces a much more stable image than a copy made on thermal paper. Plain paper is easier than thermal paper to mark, copy and file. Thermal paper is difficult to handle, particularly because of its tendency to curl.

2. Interpretation

Facsimile transmissions have the same potential to be Federal records as any other documentary materials received in Federal offices. They are Federal records when (1) they are received in connection with Agency business and (2) they are appropriate for preservation as evidence of Agency organization and activities or because of the value of the information they contain. (Refer to 36 CFR 1222.34 for additional guidance in identifying Federal records.)

### 3. Agency Action

- a. All thermal paper facsimiles that are Federal records should be xerographically reproduced on plain paper at the time of receipt, except in the case of transitory documents that do not need to be filed.

(1) This guidance does not apply to advance copies of materials on which no documented administrative action is taken. Such advance copies are non-record materials and may be destroyed immediately upon receipt of the original document.

(2) This guidance does apply to advance copies if the receiving office intends to circulate the advance copy for official purposes such as approval, comment, action, recommendation, or follow-up. In such instances, the advance copy is a Federal record and should be treated accordingly.

- b. Plain paper copies of facsimiles that are Federal records should be filed in accordance with the Agency's standard filing procedures.
- c. Agencies that anticipate receiving large volumes of facsimile transmissions that are Federal records should consider purchasing a facsimile machine that produces plain paper copies by a xerographic process.
- d. Facsimile message leaders, such as cover sheets, headers, and boxed notes, should advise the recipient to replace thermal paper facsimiles that are records with a plain paper copy. A recommended advisory is: "WARNING: Most Fax machines produce copies on thermal paper. The image produced is highly unstable and will deteriorate significantly in a few years. It should be copied on a plain paper copier prior to filing as a record."

Let us know if you have any further questions on this issue.

*Ann C. Hector*

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